

The cover features a large, dark red stylized letter 'S' on the left side. The text is centered within the white space of the 'S'. At the bottom left, there is a light pink triangular graphic element.

STARK COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

UPDATE: 2010

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INTRODUCTION

Existing County Comprehensive Plan

Stark County has been guided by a comprehensive plan entitled The Stark County Comprehensive Plan since 1982. During this 28-year period the county avoided a significant population decline that other rural areas of North Dakota experienced. The county is now confronted with growth and development issues in the agriculture and energy sectors. The increased scrutiny of the cost of public services, changing economic trends, growing concern about the effects of land consumption, and energy development has resulted in a decision to update the Stark County Comprehensive Plan.

Purpose of Updating the Comprehensive Plan

Communities and counties make a decision to update their comprehensive plans for a variety of reasons. Typically, everything that is addressed in a comprehensive plan is meant to guide policy-makers in their decisions-making process with respect to the physical nature of the land in their jurisdiction, and the manner in which those decisions affect public services. Times change. The issues and values that once drove certain land use decisions may no longer be valid and new issues and community values become more prominent. When county leaders make a decision to update a comprehensive plan, they are acknowledging these changes and are laying the groundwork to take advantage of new opportunities to guide the future of their county. The reasons for updating the Stark County Comprehensive Plan have been identified as follows:

- Effectively plan for and manage growth
- Efficient use of public lands
- Retain the viability of agricultural activities
- Identify and promote economic opportunities
- Identify, preserve, and promote the wise use of natural resources
- Protect and enhance the environment
- Partner with the cities, state and federal governments in the provision of recreational opportunities
- Ensure consistency with other planning processes
- Ensure adequate provision of public facilities and services
- Preserve historic, cultural, and archaeological resources

Stark County Comprehensive Plan

A comprehensive plan serves as a basis for making decisions on long-range development. It indicates in a general way the thoughts the people and local decision-

makers have about their county and its communities and the way they want to develop over the next years. It is not a binding document, but rather an ongoing process designed to be flexible and dynamic – subject to periodic updating and changes as needs dictate.

The plan consist of two parts: Part I contains background information on the human, economic, and natural resources and land characteristics of the county or the cities; Part II presents the plan itself through a series of Goals, Objectives, and Implementation Strategies as recommended by the Stark County Planning and Zoning Board based on input received from the public and the conclusions of the various characteristics and problems as determined through an analysis of the background information and subsequently adopted by the Board of County Commissioners.

Definitions

Goal: Broad general concept that an individual, a community, or a society wishes to attain in the future.

Objective: A more specific, measurable step to be taken toward achieving a goal.

Implementation Strategies: (Policies) A particular and coordinated action which is designed to achieve the goal and objectives.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Health, schools, taxes, traffic, the environment, public service, economic growth - are all affected by development decisions. Growth presents a tremendous opportunity for progress in Stark County. At the same time growth pressures trigger a struggle to maintain farmland or natural landscapes, small town traditions, and rural character while still benefitting from development. Economic development focuses on:

- 1) Governmental policies and programs directed at elements of the economy expanding the tax base;
- 2) Policies and programs designed to provide high quality transportation systems, public safety, housing, health, and work-force training;
- 3) Policies and programs directed at job creation and retention, higher wage levels, and real estate development.

Goal: Enhance and diversify Stark County's economy.

Objectives:

- A. Strive for a well-rounded, stable economic foundation for the county.
- B. Encourage workforce development and training efforts to retain a viable workforce for economic growth.
- C. Preserve the importance of the agriculture sector in the county.
- D. Coordinate plans to ensure an adequate supply of industrial and commercial land in appropriate locations.

Implementation Strategies:

With respect to economic development, Stark County adopts the following policies:

- 1) Stark County supports collaborative planning efforts with all jurisdictions in the County and with economic development organizations directed at identifying the need for future commercial/industrial land.
- 2) Stark County supports efforts made toward sustainable economic development that results in good stewardship of natural resources.
- 3) Stark County supports economic development efforts that result in a majority of living wage jobs rather than a majority of jobs that do not provide employees with adequate income levels.
- 4) Stark County supports the land use and zoning designation of an adequate supply of commercial and industrial land as needed to attract quality business and industrial development within the County. In particular this type of growth should be directed not only to areas adjacent to Dickinson but also to the rural business centers adjacent to the I-94 corridors surrounding

Richardton and Belfield and the Highway 10 corridor between Dickinson and South Heart.

- 5) Stark County will work to maintain federal and state district and area governmental offices in the County.
- 6) Stark County supports efforts to promote tourism and the county's recreational potential.
- 7) Stark County supports research, processing and utilization of agricultural products and by-products.
- 8) Stark County supports research, utilization, processing and conversion of energy resources and related by-products by local industries.
- 9) Stark County supports the growth of and recognizes the contribution of the local manufacturing sector and its contribution to the local economy.
- 10) Stark County supports and promotes the ideal of the family farm.

GOVERNMENTAL

While philosophies over time differ as to the role of government or the size of governmental administrative agencies, government on the county and local level, at a minimum, is charged with the task of providing for the health, safety, and welfare of the general public. As county government attempts reasonable management of beneficial growth, it must find a balance between the interest of industry, commerce, and the general public, while at the same time maintaining and protecting the rural character of the county.

Goal: Enhance the administration of county government for the betterment of Stark County and its residents.

Objectives:

- A. Provide for improved levels of communication and coordination between the county and the cities within Stark County.
- B. Provide for public involvement in the decision-making process.
- C. Provided for a cost-effective and efficient method of governmental administration and services.

Implementation Strategies:

Stark County must establish governmental policies and priorities that protect the public health and welfare and balance the needs of both the public and growth interests.

With respect to governmental administration, Stark County adopts the following policies:

- 1) Stark County supports coordination with state, federal and regional agencies and companies and associations involved in energy development to ensure appropriate planning.
- 2) Stark County supports maintaining a strong working relationship with the North Dakota State University Extension Service, Stark County Water Resource District, the Stark County Soil Conservation District, and the Stark Development Corporation.
- 3) Stark County supports working for the development of consistent and complementary zoning ordinances, subdivision regulations, and annexation procedures between Stark County and the cities within the county.
- 4) Stark County supports proportionate increases in distribution of state oil/gas and coal severance taxes relative to the energy producing counties.

- 5) Stark County supports maintaining a close working relationship between the county and the communities within Stark County.
- 6) Stark County supports the cooperation and communication on a regular basis with the neighboring county commissions of southwestern North Dakota.
- 7) Stark County supports the development of active and creative local leadership.
- 8) Stark County supports the periodic review of county codes and ordinances to ensure their current relevancy.
- 9) Stark County supports the solicitation, consideration, and utilization of citizen input and suggestions when making public decisions.
- 10) Stark County supports the use of Geographic Information System (GIS) technology and data analysis in the decision-making process where appropriate.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Stark County is blessed with abundant natural resources – coal, oil, gas, wind, uranium – with current and the potential for future development. It also has a delicate watershed system and soils conducive to erosion. The stewardship of natural resources often results in polarized opinions. All acknowledge the need to protect our natural resources. Technologies need to be developed that meet human population and economic needs in such a manner that allows the environment to sustain and regenerate its resources.

Goal: Encourage the wise and proper use or development of the county's natural resources.

Objectives:

- A. Recognize the potentials and capabilities of the land and its uses, particularly in regard to natural resource development.
- B. Maintain Stark County's clean and favorable environment.
- C. Discourage the misuse of productive agricultural land.
- D. Preserve adequate quantities and quality of ground and surface water supplies.

Implementation Strategies:

With respect to natural resource development and conservation, Stark County adopts the following policies:

- 1) Stark County supports the establishment of county natural, recreational or historical preservation areas.
- 2) Stark County supports proper planning for impacts resulting from, coal, oil, natural gas, wind, uranium, or other natural resource development.
- 3) Stark County supports the prohibition of mining activities within a two-mile radius of the jurisdictional limits of any incorporated city within the county.
- 4) Stark County supports an inventory and reclamation program aimed at abandoned coal and uranium mines and barrow pits in the county.
- 5) Stark County supports the preservation of open spaces and natural features in private and public developments.
- 6) Stark County supports the identification of and protection of available and potential sources of surface and groundwater.
- 7) Stark County supports coordination with the Stark County Water Resources District with respect to drainage issues and new development.
- 8) Stark County supports the identification of prime and unique farmland locations.

LAND USE

Planners strive to find the best and most efficient use of land. This goal is tempered by competing use values. Stark County has a diversified economy. Agriculture has historically played a dominant role in the local economy. Multiple generations of families have owned and operated the land. Any land use plan must take into account this rural heritage and the rural values it has fostered over the years. Cultural and historical resources as well as competing industrial and commercial demands must be considered in the development of any land use plan.

Goal: Assure that the use of land is properly planned and compatible with adjacent land uses.

Objectives:

- A. Encourage the wise use of agricultural land.
- B. Strive to protect the agricultural integrity of rural areas.
- C. Ensure orderly and desirable energy development.
- D. Provide for proper growth management practices.
- E. Avoid conflicts between land uses.

Implementation Strategies:

With respect to land use regulation, Stark County adopts the following policies:

- 1) Stark County supports prohibition of non-agricultural uses of floodplain areas.
- 2) Stark County supports protecting farming practices from contrasting interests of non-farm residents and businesses.
- 3) Stark County supports working toward uniform land use regulations.
- 4) Stark County supports ensuring that lot or subdivision development programs do not create runoff, siltation, or conflicting uses for adjacent property owners.
- 5) Stark County supports the prohibition of the approval of spot zoning except at established farmsteads or other sites which meet the county's requirements.
- 6) Stark County supports the establishment of rural subdivisions in accessible, easy to service areas.
- 7) Stark County supports the utilization of defined growth management sectors within the county for planning and decision-making purposes.
- 8) Stark County supports the critical evaluation of the need for additional subdivisions until a reasonable saturation level is realized in a particular growth management sector.
- 9) Stark County supports the prohibition of residential or commercial subdivisions on problem soils areas.

- 10) Stark County supports the assessment of existing utility corridors and discouraging developments that are not readily accessible to utility services.
- 11) Stark County supports subdivision designs that are compatible with the environmental characteristics of the site, as well as complement the location.
- 12) Stark County supports analyzing the ability of the county and local entities to provide increased public services (fire protection, police, roads, schools, etc.) to new development areas.
- 13) Stark County supports evaluating the need for providing separate areas for mixed housing types.
- 14) Stark County supports ensuring that adequate water and waste disposal is available prior to subdivision approval.
- 15) Stark County supports avoiding strip development or activities that encourage strip developments.
- 16) Stark County supports commercial development in homogeneous locations.
- 17) Stark County supports the prohibition of uses that depreciate land values of adjacent properties.
- 18) Stark County supports discouraging the mixing of business, residential and mobile home uses in the same subdivision or in close proximity to each other.
- 19) Stark County supports directing residential, institutional, and light commercial uses away from airport Noise Response Zones and Approach Clear Zones per the Airport Master Plan.
- 20) Stark County supports the development of standards for the construction of and maintenance of roads in subdivision developments.

PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES

County government is charged with the task of providing services and facilities for public use. These benefits are designed to protect the general health and welfare of the citizenry and to improve the general quality of life. Stark County is experiencing significant development in unincorporated areas. This presents concerns not only of whether the county is capable of meeting new demands but that the cost of providing these services often exceed the revenue generated from taxes in these areas. Public services and facilities involve law enforcement, ambulance services and road maintenance.

Goal: Plan, develop, provide and maintain adequate and efficient public facilities and services.

Objectives:

- A. Keep abreast of financial and physical needs and changes throughout the county.
- B. Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of county operations and services.
- C. Provide safe and healthy living conditions for the residents of the county.
- D. Provide a means by which the county and its cities can direct future growth and development.

Implementation Strategies:

With respect to the county's needs for public facilities and service, Stark County adopts the following policies:

- 1) Stark County supports examining the feasibility of combining city and county governmental services and facilities through intergovernmental cooperation and joint-exercise-of-powers agreements for cooperative ventures, thus avoiding duplication of services and facilities and minimizing tax expenditures.
- 2) Stark County supports ensuring that the costs of additional services and facilities are equitably distributed between actual users and general taxpayers.
- 3) Stark County supports the continual update of departmental manpower and equipment needs assessments, priorities, fiscal impact analysis and capital improvement programs.
- 4) Stark County supports providing adequate law enforcement services and equipment throughout the county.
- 5) Stark County supports providing for the needs of the county's senior citizen population.
- 6) Stark County supports providing adequate emergency services throughout the county and training for emergency medical and para-medical personnel.

- 7) Stark County supports developing a fiscal awareness of the county's capabilities and its ability to prepare accordingly several years in advance.
- 8) Stark County supports providing for the park and recreational needs of all county residents, increasing facilities and services where warranted by population densities.
- 9) Stark County supports upgrading existing facilities and services to meet state and federal standards.
- 10) Stark County supports ensuring that social service programs are available and managed in a cost-effective manner.
- 11) Stark County supports the development of adequate medical facilities within the county.
- 12) Stark County supports the establishment of a county-wide Geographic Information System (GIS) incorporating all jurisdictions.
- 13) Stark County supports upgrading its current website for the use and benefit of the citizens of the county and to take advantage of technological advances for information dissemination.

TRANSPORTATION

An adequate transportation system is key to the continued economic growth and development in Stark County. This is the case both for agricultural and commercial interests. Stark County currently enjoys vehicular, truck, train, bus and air service, more than any other county in the region. Energy development impacts will stress the county's transportation systems and networks.

Goal: Provide and maintain an adequate transportation system within Stark County.

Objectives:

- A. Provide reliable routes for the transfer of agricultural products from farms to markets.
- B. Integrate county road improvements with land use needs and public service areas.
- C. Ensure the long-term viability of air, truck, bus, and rail services in the county.

Implementation Strategies:

- 1) Stark County supports ensuring access by county residents to necessary facilities, services, and public transportation systems.
- 2) Stark County supports determining snow removal and maintenance capacities within the county on a need basis.
- 3) Stark County supports developing a road improvement and bridge replacement program.
- 4) Stark County supports developing a preferred heavy traffic road network by cataloging and posting roads by weight.
- 5) Stark County supports the use of low water crossings as an alternative to over-designed bridges and structures where appropriate.
- 6) Stark County supports the regular maintenance of farm-to-market roads.
- 7) Stark County supports a regular assessment of the rural roads system to determine maintenance scheduling and road access needs.
- 8) Stark County supports establishing and implementing right of way needs for future roadway network improvements.
- 9) Stark County supports locating rural subdivisions in areas presently serviced by arterial roads and which can accommodate the additional traffic load.
- 10) Stark County supports the prohibition of non-farm development from being placed in a location that does not have a paved road or highway as its primary route of access to the development's local street system.
- 11) Stark County supports updating the county's subdivision regulations to establish requirements for developer financing of paving access roads between the paved highway system and the local streets within the development.

- 12) Stark County supports the use of local airport facilities.
- 13) Stark County supports providing alternative transportation services such as bicycle and pedestrian facilities where feasible and desirable.